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ABSTRACT

The educational approaches, programs, and services developed for American Indians at both tribal colleges and non-tribal community colleges can be used as models by other institutions seeking to serve minority populations better. The community college is an important avenue for American Indians pursuing postsecondary degrees; in 1988, 50,400 of the 92,000 American Indians enrolled in higher education were attending two-year colleges, and associate degrees constituted nearly 40% of the total number of degrees conferred to American Indians in 1989-90. While several of the 25 tribal colleges award baccalaureate and master's degrees, and one is a university, these institutions, like community colleges, are among the most community-responsive in higher education. The success of tribal colleges can be attributed to their combining distinctive cultural elements with a pragmatic approach to education. Because instructors act as agents of Indian history, language, and culture, students learn that their communities' beliefs have great value, while simultaneously acquiring the skills necessary for future educational and occupational endeavors. Tribal colleges also experiment with culturally conscious approaches to instruction, emphasizing visual and cooperative learning. Among the non-Indian community colleges that have been especially responsive to Indian students are: (1) San Juan College (New Mexico), which has developed a set of interrelated services that attract and retain American Indians; (2) American River College (California), which has created the Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement/Minority Engineering Program; and (3) Truman College (Illinois), which has developed the Institute for Native American Development. (MAB)

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AMERICAN INDIANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

by D. Michael Pavel and Anita Y. Colby

The community college is an important avenue for American Indians seeking to obtain a postsecondary degree. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* ("Almanac," 1992) reports that American Indian enrollment at two-year institutions has risen steadily from 47,000 in 1980 to 54,000 in 1990, an increase of 14%. Although their enrollment at four-year institutions increased by 29% over the same period, as of 1990, American Indians were still more likely than Asians, Blacks, or Whites to enroll at two-year colleges rather than four-year institutions. Of the 92,500 American Indians enrolled in higher education in 1988, 50,400 were attending two-year colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 1991). Of the total number of degrees conferred to American Indians in 1989-90, nearly 40% were associate degrees. In comparison, approximately 20% of the degrees conferred to Asians and Whites and 30% of those conferred to Blacks and Hispanics were associate degrees.

This digest offers an optimistic and positive portrayal of the role of tribal colleges and non-tribal community colleges in American Indian higher education. Both types of institutions have much to offer as role models for other sectors of higher education in serving minority populations.

Tribal "Community" Colleges

The development of twenty-five tribal colleges since 1969 represents an exciting development in American higher education. In a little over 20 years, these unique institutions have established a precedent of success that stands in stark contrast to 480 years of failure to provide quality higher education services to American Indians. "One of the key reasons for the tribal colleges' success has been the belief and practice that students can remain Indian, can practice tribal traditions and retain tribal values and also be successful students" (Amiotte and Allen, 1989, p. 1). While several tribal colleges award four-year and master's degrees and one is a university, these institutions are some of the most community oriented in higher education. "Like their community college counterparts across the United States, tribal colleges are expected to serve the needs of both individuals and communities" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989, p. 52).

The philosophy of tribal colleges interweaves distinctive cultural elements and a pragmatic approach into the postsecondary process. The curriculum emphasizes not only the academic requirements of future educational and occupational success, but also the cultural contributions and philosophies of the tribal community (Wicks and Price, 1981). "Students learn firmly that who they are and what they believe has great value. Rather than being a disorienting experience for students, college represents a reinforcement of values inherent in the tribal community" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1989, p. 56). With this preparation and sense of self-worth, many tribal college graduates have gone on for further study or found meaningful work in geographic areas where low educational attainment levels and high unemployment rates are the norm (Wright and Weasel Head, 1990).

This record of success is remarkable, given that tribal colleges commonly experience such problems as inadequate facilities, low per student expenditures, lack of comprehensive student services, low salaries, underfunded libraries, and generally inadequate budgets (Wright, 1989; Carnegie Foundation, 1989). Also remarkable is the high level of student satisfaction that Wright found with what these institutions actually do provide. Part of what tribal colleges are uniquely able to provide is culture conscious teaching. "Culture conscious teaching is a learning process by which teachers acquaint themselves with the culture(s) of their learners in order to use different modes and content of instruction" (Robinson, 1989, p. 18). At Oglala Lakota College, this process involves prospective teachers enrolling tuition-free in a college program in Lakota studies (Robinson, 1989). The college expects teachers to realize that they are to do more than dispense information--as teachers, they are expected to act as the socializing agents of Indian history, language and culture. They are to help their students raise their aspirations and expectations, and continue the traditions of their society. Boyer (1990), too, stresses the importance of students' learning that "the beliefs and practices that were once forcibly suppressed by federal administrators do have value and relevance in the society today" and points to the tribal colleges' incorporation of traditional culture "throughout the entire curriculum in an effort to make subjects more relevant and accessible to students" (p. 26).

A specific example of a culturally conscious approach to instruction is provided by Haukoos and Satterfield (1986), who changed the climate of a biology classroom to accommodate the high visual-perception and lower verbal and expressive skills exhibited by American Indian students. Specific changes were to emphasize discussion rather than lecture and to increase the wait-time during question-and-answer sessions. In addition, the instructors took a less directive position by sitting for most of the session at student eye level in front of the desk. Discussion sessions were saturated with photographic slides and visuals that contained relevant graphics, as well as images of organisms and natural settings. Peer and teacher small group study sessions were implemented to stimulate interaction.

Several tribal colleges are utilizing cooperative learning strategies. Boyer notes that these methods emphasize the value placed on cooperation in many American Indian cultures, in comparison to the model of individual competition more prevalent in Western culture. They also provide a greater level of personal support to help students negotiate the college and financial aid bureaucracies than is typically offered at most colleges and universities.

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Non-Tribal Community Colleges

Many non-Indian community colleges have also been receptive to American Indian students and responsive to their communities. James Henderson (1991), president of San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico, points out that "the community college will be the institution that will increase the numbers of Native American students who successfully transfer to a four-year institution and obtain a degree" (p. 49). San Juan College itself has made major strides in carrying out this mission.

Five components undergird San Juan's success:

- Bridges between the community college and the K-12 system have allowed students to earn college credits while in high school, encouraged students to stay in school, and helped them and their parents to develop postsecondary intentions and goals. In addition, students are advised about the high school courses that they will need to prepare for specific college majors.
- A Native American Program, staffed by a full-time director, provides counseling, assistance with scheduling, and information on tribal scholarships and financial aid, while also providing leadership training and various opportunities for social interaction, including an Indian club.
- An assessment and advisement program helps place students in appropriate programs at the correct level.
- A Renewal Center offers tutoring at no cost and special workshops on financial aid, academic study skills, and basic tips for students returning to school.
- Outreach is key to San Juan's success in recruiting and retaining American Indian students. Off-campus learning centers, placed in close proximity to the reservations, provide a variety of developmental, adult education, general education, and community services classes.

Several of these components are reflected in programs targeting American Indian students at other two-year colleges. The Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement/ Minority Engineering program at Mesa College is designed to serve as a bridge for American Indian and other minority students between high school and college, providing scholarships, leadership development activities, enrichment programs, and support services (Lee, and others, 1990). The Institute for Native American Development at Truman College in Chicago also has three overlapping components: advising/ placement, academic skill development/cultural awareness, and financial aid/job placement (Illinois State Board of Education, 1983).

Conclusion

Whether tribal or non-Indian in origin and administration, community colleges -- as community-based institutions -- are in a good position to satisfy simultaneously the needs of American Indian cultures and the demands of American society. Community colleges throughout the country are commited to expanding access to higher education to people who would otherwise be excluded and finding innovative and effective means of serving nontraditional students in their quest for academic, vocational, and remedial education. The educational future of many American Indians will depend upon the colleges' continued success in fulfilling these missions.

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